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A

PLAN OF REFORM,

IN THE

MODE OF INSTRUCTION,

AT PRESENT PRACTISED IN

ENGLISH SCHOOLS.

ALSO,

A PROPOSAL FOR THE

IMPROVEMENT OF PUBLIC SPEAKING.

BY

HENRY MACNAB. *K*

GLASGOW.

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To the Right Honourable

EDMUND BURKE, M. P.

S I R,

I HUMBLY apprehend, a plan of Reformation in a course of English instruction, may be dedicated to you with the greatest propriety. Literary merit, and the virtues of humanity, are indeed qualities which must meet with respect and admiration not only from *an individual*, but also from *the bulk of mankind*. Give me leave however to observe, there are other motives more relative to my design, which have made me anxious to be honoured with your patronage. The attention you have paid to the English language, and the knowledge you must have acquired of its beauties and defects, will naturally dispose you to view every attempt to improve it, as an object of considerable importance. And that you have embellished our language with

DEDICATION.

beauties of diction, of which it was scarcely thought susceptible, is a circumstance which must render every design to establish a proper mode of instruction, in our English schools, as well as in the higher departments of eloquence, extremely interesting to you. The design therefore I am confident you are inclined to promote; and should the execution of it be found *in any degree*, deserving of your approbation, it will afford the greatest pleasure to,

Sir,

Your most obedient

And very humble servant,

HENRY MACNAB.

GLASGOW, 28th Oct.

1786.

PL A N O F
R E F O R M A T I O N
I N A
C O U R S E O F
E N G L I S H I N S T R U C T I O N .

THE importance of a good education is evident to every one. Its utility has been acknowledged by the most eminent writers among the Ancients, and also by the most celebrated Modern authors. From the importance of a good education, it is to be hoped that every attempt to establish it, will be received by the public with indulgence, if not with encouragement. Now, of all the various branches of education, a knowledge of our own language is, perhaps, the most necessary and important. Indeed to be properly instructed in it, is certainly the most effectual way to enable us to obtain an accurate knowledge of foreign languages. Sensible of the importance of a knowledge of their own, we find the Ancients made their respective languages a principal object of attention. At Athens the Greek

language was studied with great ardour; and at Rome the Latin language was made an object of the utmost importance. Is it not astonishing that the inhabitants of Great Britain, a rich, commercial, and polite nation; a nation where every possible encouragement is given to improvement in all the arts and sciences, and also to teachers of foreign languages; do not give equal encouragement to teachers of their own language? The necessity of a reformation in teaching a course of English, has been acknowledged and insisted on by many of our most reputable authors. The ingenious and popular Mr. Sheridan, has furnished us with a plan for this purpose. It is but fair to own that the repeated efforts of this gentleman deserved not only the approbation, but also the encouragement of the public; and although Mr. Sheridan's plan has not accomplished a reformation, yet he has certainly made great advances towards it. Indeed it was not to be expected that a reformation would instantly be brought about by any individual, a considerable time being necessary to accomplish it. That Mr. Sheridan's plan has not been adopted, by no means proves it to be defective. He has certainly however contributed his part, by having prepared the public, in a great degree, for some improvement. I do not presume to say that

it may now be expected. It must be allowed however, that to point out to the public, in a moderate and impartial manner, the inconveniences arising from the present modes of instruction, with a plan of reformation, and also the advantages which would flow from it, is a proper and necessary step to accomplish this end.

Now, if we look into our English schools, we shall find the teacher employed in instructing his scholars in a knowledge of all the different branches of an English course, which must divide his attention, and consequently, prove a very great obstacle to improvement. Would it not be deemed highly improper in a professor of physic, for instance, to instruct his scholars in a knowledge of anatomy, of botany, of chymistry, and of medicine, at the same meeting. The scholars would certainly receive very confused conceptions of these different branches of physic, from such an irregular procedure. The same inconveniences arise from teaching the different branches of an English course at the same meeting. Indeed, the promoters of public establishments for the encouragement of literature over all modern Europe, seem to have been convinced of the impropriety of allowing more than one branch of knowledge to be taught at the same time; for in all univer-

fities, academies, and grammar-schools, the different branches of a course of education are kept apart, and to each branch in general is appropriated a teacher.

Would not establishments of a like nature, contribute greatly to improvement in teaching the *English* language? Can any satisfactory reasons be given, why establishments of this kind have not been instituted for an English course of instruction? Is not an accurate knowledge of our own language equally, nay, much more necessary than a knowledge of foreign languages? Ought not that language which we have at all times occasion to use, to be well understood?

But how is it *understood*? How is it *read*? How is it *written*? How is it *spoken*? How is it *taught*? Do we not every day meet with scholars, who, after having finished an English course of instruction, can neither spell, pronounce, read, speak, nor write their own language, without violating either its orthography, orthoepy, principles of expression, or grammatical construction.

To whom is this universal deficiency owing? Shall we impute the fault to the teachers, to the scholars, or to the public? It is necessary that this question should be answered; for we must know where the fault lies, before we can apply the means to be used in removing the inconveniences,

which arise from it. Previous to answering this question, let us endeavour to find out the cause, why the Greek, the Latin, and the French languages, are so well understood, and accurately taught in Britain. Is it not entirely owing to the encouragement given by the public to the teachers of these languages? Would these languages be equally well taught, were the public to withdraw their encouragement? It would be highly absurd to suppose it. It cannot be expected, that men, either in a public or private capacity, will make great exertions in any profession, without suitable encouragement.

Does the public hold forth suitable encouragement to teachers of the English language? The low condition of teachers of English in Britain, is a convincing proof of the contrary. The *public*, and not the teachers, therefore, must be charged with the fault.

Are not teachers the servants of the public? To whom therefore, should they go for encouragement but to the public; for it is the public that reap the benefit which arises from their services?

Is it not much to be regretted, that a class of men so necessary and useful, who have the care, not only of the edu-

cation and manners, but also of the *morals* of youth, are so ungenerously rewarded.

The indifference shown to the improvement of the English language, and the small encouragement given to the teachers of it, will, at some future period, throw a stain on the British nation, never to be wiped away.

The inattention shown by the public to the improvement of our own language may perhaps be accounted for. It proceeds from a principle very common in human nature; every thing that is familiar to us, however valuable, we are naturally indifferent about, unless our attention is directed to these objects by particular motives.

The public are daily using this language; and as far as they can judge, find that it serves all the purposes of society. From the manner in which they have been instructed in it, from their having been hurried on to other branches of knowledge, or from the necessary avocations of society, they are prevented from making the English language an object of attention.

It is not to be expected, therefore, that the public will, of themselves, see the necessity of a reformation. The inconveniences which arise from the present modes of instruction, and the advantages which will flow from a reformation, *must be pointed out* to the public.

Were these things properly represented, we will venture to assert, that the public will give every suitable encouragement to such a laudable purpose.

Teachers of English, we may easily conceive, will be apt to entertain doubts with regard to the justness of this assertion. Experience however, will confirm it. The few teachers of English in Britain, who, by raising their fees, have, with a prudent resolution, ventured their success in teaching to the public, will, from the liberal encouragement they have received, testify, that the generous public, are very much disposed to reward merit, and encourage every design, which tends to the welfare of society. Instructors of youth, have a superior claim to encouragement from the state, above most other classes of men. The importance of good instruction cannot be too highly estimated. We find, the public hold forth suitable motives to industry and merit, to eminent men in several professions, less necessary or important. Why then should we doubt of their willingness, to encourage and reward the instructors of youth? A well-conducted education, is the most effectual way to secure virtue in society; for, "just as the twig is bent the tree's inclin'd."

But besides this powerful motive, which proceeds from a

love of our country, there are other motives, the most *engaging* and *tender* that can actuate the human heart.

To have our sons and daughters properly instructed in their own native language, and trained up in the way they should go, are winning motives to the anxious parents' breast. We here touch the string on which rest all their hopes. They are powerfully drawn by this cord; for it is indeed the cord of love.

It may however be said, that granting the public are willing to allow every proper encouragement to teachers of English, the irksomeness and slavery of the employment, will prevent men of genius from following it.

We shall allow, according to the present condition of our English schools, that the business of teaching is a slavery, to which few men of genius would submit. But does this slavery arise from the nature of the exercise? By no means. The small fees given for teaching, force the teacher to take more scholars than he is able properly to instruct; oblige him to teach two or more branches of a course at the same time; deprive him of availing himself of an opportunity of acquiring a particular knowledge of any branch, and also of paying proper attention to the method he adopts in instructing youth.

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Such a confused and laborious employment must not only injure the health, but also weaken the faculties of the mind, and try the temper of a teacher to a very great degree. But in a *well-conducted* course of instruction this is not the case; instead of the task being burdensome and disagreeable, it is easy to the teacher, and agreeable to the scholar.

“ To rear the tender thought,

“ To teach the young idea, how to shoot,

“ To pour the fresh instruction o’er the mind,

“ Is a delightful task.”

And the cheering rays of the sun, are not more agreeable to the bodily eye, than the illuminating beams of instruction are to the eye of the mind.

We are sorry to see sensible teachers prosecuting a plan of instruction, not only unprofitable to themselves, but evidently detrimental to their scholars. To this mode of teaching, we may partly attribute the extreme aversion children universally show to schools.

What a pity is it those tender plants should be reared into such an unfavourable climate! Any person who doubts the truth of what I have said respecting the *unnatural aversion* which children have to instruction, may listen to the *voice of sorrow* in these young mourners, in schools; and

then consult his heart. Let us remember, that as these inconveniences arise from an improper, so they may consequently be easily removed by adopting a proper course of instruction. For it is an evident truth, "that nature, in her workings, inclines not with more ardour to creation," than the human mind to instruction. When we find therefore children unhappy, in a course of instruction, "*we must blame the culture, not the soil!*"

Having endeavoured to show, that the public, in all probability, will allow suitable encouragement to teachers of their own language—that men of genius will be induced to follow that profession, and that the scholars, instead of finding instruction to be a disagreeable, they will find it to be an agreeable and pleasant employment; we shall now point out more particularly, how this reformation may be accomplished.

In order to show that a reformation may be accomplished without much expence or trouble, we shall endeavour to give the *out-lines* of a plan which would, perhaps, have that tendency.

Previous to this, we beg leave to remark, that as our plan will not permit teachers to undertake the instruction of so many scholars at the same time as they do at present,

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it will therefore be necessary, that their fees be augmented: perhaps half-a-guinea quarterly will be sufficient for this purpose; and we are convinced, that no parent, anxious for the welfare and improvement of his child, will deem it extravagant.

It will be necessary that the public express their willingness to allow teachers this encouragement. In every city and principal town in Britain, it will be proper therefore, that the professors of universities, the magistrates, the clergymen, and gentlemen, make choice of three men of distinguished abilities in teaching English; that these men be united as members of the same society, called by the name of an English grammar-school, or rather an *English academy*. The reason why three teachers should be appointed, is, that a complete English course of instruction may be divided into three different branches; viz. First, a knowledge of letters, syllables, and words; or as it is commonly expressed, a knowledge of the spelling-book. Secondly, a knowledge of a course of reading. And lastly, a knowledge of grammar, and the * meaning of words in the English language.

* Is it not a great defect in our English instruction, that the scholars are not taught a knowledge of the meaning of words commonly used in our language?

Now, only one of these three branches should be taught by each of these men at the same time. The first year, for instance, the one teaches a knowledge of the spelling-book; the other, a knowledge of reading; and the third, a knowledge of grammar, and the meaning of words. By a regular rotation, they teach only one branch at the same time, and each of them begins, carries on, and finishes his own scholars. It will be necessary that the fees arising from all the classes in the academy be shared by the teachers alike for the *first year*, as the numbers in each class may be very unequal. Sufficient sums of money may be raised by subscription, for the purpose of building commodious academies. The situation of these academies, and suitable plans may be determined by a committee of gentlemen, chosen by the subscribers. If there shall be more money collected than serves to defray the expence of building these academies, it will, perhaps, be proper to divide it among the teachers, as an equivalent for any inconvenience which may arise during the first year of these establishments.

It is by no means proposed that these teachers shall be allowed salaries; on the contrary, we think, that the teacher should depend entirely on the fees of his scholars. At first view, perhaps, the fees we have proposed will be considered

as extravagant. We humbly apprehend however, that few people can think that it is an unreasonable demand. An English course of instruction, according to our calculation, is finished in three years. The expence therefore of each scholar amounts to six guineas. Now, who would not willingly give that sum to qualify his child to spell, to read, to speak, to understand, and also to write his own language grammatically.

We may with great safety assert, that every one, who can afford to pay this sum, will do it with the greatest satisfaction. We cannot expect it from those who are unable to pay it. We shall afterwards point out such methods, as will allow the teachers an equivalent, for the loss they would sustain by teaching the children of the poor.

But it may be asked, what advantages will arise from this plan of instruction?

The advantages which will arise from this plan of instruction, are the following. 1st, The teacher will be enabled to reduce his number of scholars, and lessen his labour; this will enable him to instruct his scholars in such a manner as will render the business easy to himself, and agreeable to his scholars.

2dly, The whole course will be taught so well, that the scholar will be enabled to read, to write, and to understand his own language, without violating its orthography, orthoepy, principles of expression, or grammatical construction.

3dly, A laudable ambition to excel in teaching will take place, founded upon self-interest; and a becoming desire of filling up a conspicuous station, in a reputable manner; for it is not those, who, independent of their abilities, can form the greatest connexions, or obtain the greatest interest, are here preferred; but on the contrary, those who by their genius, industry, and moral worth, attract the attention of the public, and by this means only, raise themselves from an obscure to an eminent situation.

4thly, Men of genius will be induced to teach the English language; and may by their united efforts, bring our language to a state of improvement, of which we are at present entirely ignorant.

It may perhaps here be urged, that allowing these advantages would arise from establishing an academy in each city and town, that this would only accomplish a partial reformation; that the greater part of the inhabitants would receive no advantage from this plan; that it is only the rich and

opulent, who can afford to give their children, this regular course; and that the poor of the land, are excluded from the enjoyment of these advantages.

These are only plausible objections. Instead of this plan only accomplishing a partial, we shall endeavour to shew that it will evidently bring about a general reformation—a reformation which does not depend upon the sluggish and irregular pace arising from independent salaries; but on the contrary, it is a reformation founded on the noblest basis, where genius is encouraged, industry rewarded, and perseverance secured.

It by no means follows, that there will only be *one* academy in each city and town. On the contrary, it is extremely probable, that they will be *numerous*. The generality of teachers will, from a principle of interest, enter into associations of this kind. The public need not be apprehensive of inconveniences arising from men who are not qualified to teach eminently. Such men may, and indeed will enter into associations of this kind. The public, however, will be enabled from the leading academies, to form proper conceptions of good teaching; and if they allow liberal encouragement, they will make it their business to de-

test unqualified teachers. Let us not therefore attempt to deprive these men of a natural liberty, as they cannot injure society by enjoying it.

But it may likewise be said, that all the teachers of English cannot be expected to go in with this plan; that at least some of them will have objections to enter into these associations. We must here observe, that we hope the method of *teaching only one branch at the same meeting* will, from its utility, become so prevalent, that these men will of consequence adopt it. The inconveniences therefore, which would arise from their not entering immediately into an association, will be of little consequence.

Perhaps, however, a few individuals will be so stubborn as to persist in an opposite method, by teaching a number of branches at the same time. Now, if the advantages arising from our method, are of so much importance, as we have endeavoured to point out, it is evident, that even these obstinate people, will, from a principle of *interest*, be induced to adopt it. The public, will in a short time, be able to discriminate a good method, from a bad method of instruction. The teacher must from *necessity* therefore, adopt the most approved and useful method.

We shall next endeavour to remove the difficulty which

was formerly raised, respecting the small fees the teacher would receive from the poor.

The difficulty may be removed by allowing salaries to teachers for this purpose. Thus the teacher of the poor will be on a footing with those who are employed in teaching the children of the rich. Is it not extremely absurd, that in many schools in Britain, teachers who are allowed salaries, are chiefly employed in instructing the children of the opulent and wealthy? Are not these people able to pay for the education of their children, independent of the aid of the public funds? It is true indeed, that they pay a certain sum; but it is small in proportion to what they *ought* to pay. Can any thing be more reasonable, than that the rich should pay handsome fees for instruction; and that the poor, by a proper assistance from the public funds, joined with such fees as their circumstances will afford, should be enabled to give their tender offspring a good education? We do not pretend to dictate to the public, nor shall we presume to say, what salaries these teachers ought to be allowed. Perhaps the public may find it burdensome to make their encouragement equal to teachers, who are employed by those who can afford to pay half-a-guinea quarterly. It is certainly proper, however, to

allow them all possible encouragement ; and although it may not, in some instances, be equal to the other class of teachers, yet it should be such as may be sufficient to support themselves and their families in an easy and comfortable manner.

It only remains that we point out how in the country, where there are in general only one teacher in each parish, the method we have recommended, may be adopted, of teaching only one branch of an English course at the same meeting. For this purpose it is proposed, that the teacher appropriate a certain number of hours daily to each of his classes. The first class, for instance, may meet in the morning from nine to ten o'clock. The second class, from ten to eleven. And the third class, from eleven to twelve. The first may meet again from one to two, in the afternoon. The second class, from two to three. And the third class may meet from three to four o'clock, in the afternoon. We must own that this method can only be adopted in those schools where English is chiefly taught. Thus we have pointed out the defects of the present modes of instruction in our English schools, and endeavoured to offer a proper remedy : but we must go a step farther, we wish in reading and speaking to add to propriety, elegance, ease, and expression. Of all the fine arts, the art of speaking is the most en-

gaging and important. It procures to society the noblest pleasures, and the most useful recreations. All the shadings of passion, all the delicacies of sentiment, and all the fibres of the human heart, if I may be allowed the expression, are controuled by this enchanting art, which philosophers esteem, and men of sensibility and taste admire. Intimately connected with learning and science, it has contributed like them, to consecrate the repose of those powerful nations, who have alternately disputed the right of enlightening the world, after having laid it waste. With them public speaking made a chief branch of education, and was reckoned a necessary study, for calling forth and perfecting all the gifts of nature.

That celebrated orator, who from his judgment seat, dictated to the conqueror of Athens, received instruction from the actor Andronicus. Quintilian often cites with praise Esopus a celebrated actor. The friendship of Cicero, for Roscius, shows in what estimation the art of speaking was held at Rome. And it is with pleasure we here observe, that the great respect and admiration, which has been bestowed on a *Garrick*, and a *Siddons*, is a strong proof of the influence and importance of good public speaking, in Great Britain.

To have established teachers of elocution amongst us, therefore, would certainly be productive of the most beneficial consequences to individuals, and to society.

Perhaps to establish regular schools of elocution, might be easily accomplished in the following manner. In each city, and principal town in Britain, a teacher of elocution should be established.

As the employment of these men is precarious, it will be necessary they should be allowed salaries.

We shall not presume to say what salaries should be allowed; the public is best qualified to judge of that matter. It is our business only to point out the necessity of it. "A certain income (says Mr. Sheridan) would be a strong inducement to many young men of talents, whose prospects in life may not be considerable, to strike into that course; though they would not venture to quit the beaten path upon precarious prospects only, or the chance of what gratuity they might receive from pupils. Yet it may not be found necessary in the event, that these salaries shall be perpetual, but only for a certain term of years, as before mentioned, 'till these studies should have gained a solid establishment, and become general; for in that case, instructors will obtain a sufficient income from their pupils, as other masters do; and the whole, or part of those salaries, at the pleasure of the society, may revert to the fund for other purposes."

These salaries may be advanced either from the public

funds, or by subscription. The power of election may be given to those who advance the salaries. To have a separate teacher for each kind of public speaking, would certainly contribute most effectually to improvement. But as employment could not be found in the generality of cities and towns for three, one teacher will be sufficient for such places.

In the metropolis of Britain however, we apprehend, that teachers of the delivery suited to the stage, the bar, and the pulpit, may find sufficient employment.*

It will be still more precarious, however, than those who profess all the different branches of elocution. To induce men of abilities therefore to follow this profession, *handsome salaries ought to be allowed them by government.*†

Academies, adapted particularly to the convenience of these teachers, might easily be built by subscription, and the plan and situation of them to be determined either by a committee from parliament, or a committee of gentlemen chosen by the subscribers.

* Perhaps there may also be found sufficient employment for three professors of elocution, in the city of *Edinburgh*.

† The French King bestows about half a dozen pensions to learned men in several parts of Europe, and perhaps a dozen in his own kingdom, which, in the whole, do probably not amount to half the income of many a private commoner in England, yet have more contributed to the glory of that

The teachers established in London, who have daily an opportunity of acquiring a knowledge of court pronunciation, may correspond with the teachers of elocution in different parts of Britain, and these teachers of elocution may keep up an immediate intercourse with the teachers of English. Indeed the teachers of elocution, will, in all probability, be much employed by the teachers of English. This circumstance alone must contribute greatly to the improvement of the English language, and, in all probability, will be a proper mean of ascertaining the pronunciation of it.

Thus we have endeavoured to give the *out-lines* of a plan of reformation in our English schools; and also a proposal for the improvement of public speaking.

The arguments we have adduced, it is hoped, will show the *necessity* and *importance* of a reformation. Previous to concluding this subject, however, we must beg leave to direct the attention of our readers to the disagreeable consequences, which arise from the present condition of our English schools, prince, than any million he hath otherwise employed. For learning, like all true merit, is easily satisfied whilst the false and counterfeit is perpetually craving, and never thinks it hath enough. The smallest favour given by a great prince, as a mark of esteem, to reward the endowments of the mind, never fails to be returned with praise and gratitude, and loudly celebrated to the world. . See Dr. Swift's letter, to Robert Earl of Oxford.

and a want of teachers of elocution, both to public and private characters.

We shall only point out the inconveniences, which arise from an improper method of instruction, in one of the three branches of an English course, namely, reading or speaking.

Now, we apprehend, that the provincial dialects of each county and shire, in Britain, are in a great measure, preserved by the present modes of teaching; for we shall venture to assert, that a proper method of instruction would, in a short time, remove at least the most marked features of provincial dialect.

That the inhabitants from different parts of the island of Britain, a commercial and civilized nation, cannot in many instances speak intelligibly to each other, is a circumstance which, were it not frequently met with, we would scarcely have conceived it possible to have happened.

Provincial dialect is so very great in different parts of Britain, that among the low-born people of different counties and shires, it is a constant source of ridicule, animosities and quarrels.

Even in higher circles, there is not any thing, which tends to interrupt the streams of politeness more, than a provincial dialect. They are indeed incompatible with each other.

But besides these inconveniences which daily happen to

individuals, there are others more hurtful to society, which arise from men in a public capacity, who, from a bad education in their own language, are unable to speak in public.

How many men are there, for instance, of genius, industry, and moral worth, in the pulpit, at the bar, and in parliament, who, from not being able to speak their own language with propriety, expression, and ease, are deprived, in a great measure, of reclaiming the wicked, defending the injured, and preserving the liberties of their country.

F I N I S.

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In the Press, and speedily will be published, in a few days, by the same Author.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL LANGUAGE, as used in reading and speaking. Illustrated by examples from the English language.

Will also be immediately published,

THE DIRECTOR, in teaching English, or the elements of the English language.

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